A CHRISTMAS TURKEY.

HOW GRANDMA STOLE ONE WHEN SHE WAS A GIRL.

WRITTEN EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE EVENING STAR BY MRS E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH.

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WHAT would you say, my dears, if I were to tell you that I had once stolen a Christmas turkey?"

Amazement petrified us for a moment, and then—

"You!"

"You—!! Grandma!!!"

"Stole ——!!!"

"A turkey ——!!!" burst forth like catches in a roundelay from Ev, Lu and Vi while the two imps Til and Tim stared opened mouthed as open eyed at the venerable gentlewoman whose very name was a synonym for the collective Christian virtues—"a mother in Israel," a leader in religious revivals, an eloquent preacher on occasions, whose face would shine as the face of an angel radiant with holy inspiration as it seemed now with homely, household humor as she made this astounding confession.

She steal a turkey! Steal anything! And look so sly over the self-accusation! I said nothing at all. I thought her mind going. She was over seventy!

"Yes, a Christmas turkey!" added grandma in the most hardened tone.

"Christmas turkey!" echoed Vi, as if that added heinousness to the humiliating confession.

"Yes! a Christmas turkey," repeated grandma, with a solemnity that was belied by the irrepressible humor that twinkled from her eyes and the corners of her pursed up lips.

Lu and Vi sighed; the imps stared.

"Oh, I know how it was," said Vi. "Of course, it was grandpa's turkey; that was, of course, your own, that you took for some charity," continued Vi, and we all drew a deep breath of relief. Certainly, that was it!

"No, indeed," said grandma, "it was nothing of the sort. The person I went to steal the turkey from was a total stranger to me."

"Well, then you had some sort of right to the turkey. He had stolen it from you first of all," suggested Vi.

"No, I never owned the turkey or heard of it, or the man before the night I went to steal it."

"It was for some charitable purpose, though," said Lu.

"No! It was for the simple pleasure of stealing it."

"Then it was to win a wager?" said Vi as the last suggestion.

"Not at all. But if you will all stop staring and exclaiming I will tell you all about it. It happened just fifty years ago tonight, and it is a very appropriate time to tell the story," said grandma, amused at the curiosity she had excited.

But before I tell grandma's story I must give some short explanation of the situation. It was Christmas eve. An arctic night in our northern town. The snow was a foot deep on the ground and frozen hard as crystal. The wind blew a gale from the northwest, rattling down the icicles from the trees and driving them like hail against the walls and windows of our house. The stars glittered like points of diamonds from the blue-black sky. Early in the evening we had drawn the red woolen curtains to shut out the wintry scene from grandma's cosy red room, which was all fitted up in that warm color from the four post curtained bedstead to the cushioned armchair in which she now sat before the open wood fire, which she would have at all costs because it reminded her of her young days in old Maryland. You see grandma was a southern woman.

It was getting on toward 9 o'clock; papa was still at his store—a large grocery—busily engaged in sending off belated Christmas parcels to his customers, and also, bless his dear heart! dispatching Christmas gifts of his choicest stock to the very poor of the town. Mamma was up stairs getting the baby to sleep; mamma has always been up stairs getting the baby to sleep ever since I can remember, and that was when I was about three years old, and dear Winny, who is now an angel in heaven, was the baby. We girls had finished all our housekeeping duties, which were more than usual on this night. We had put away all the mince and cranberry and pumpkin pies, and lady cakes, pound cake, plum cake and other Christmas dainties in the pantry, and had set the table for Christmas breakfast, and had seen to the fire and lamp in papa's little smoking room, and had laid his gown over his armchair and his slippers on the hearth; and now we were free. Oh! except just one thing! we had not yet filled the children's stockings; nor could we do it until those imps of Old Nick should be in bed and asleep, but they seemed determined to stay awake all night. I have said it often, and I say it again, that if ever there were a set of spoiled children to make their elder sisters' lives a burden to them it is—— But there! it is no use talking! Only I know if ever I marry and have a family to bring up—but no matter.

Now on this arctic night we gathered around grandma's great wood fire which, as I said, she would keep up in spite of furnace and steam pipes, and moreover, in spite of expense. We loved to gather here and listen to her stories of old plantation life in Maryland as she knew it in her younger days, more than half a century ago. Now here she sat in her large crimson cushioned easy chair, with her feet on a hassock and her hands mechanically plying her knitting needles—another relic of her old plantation life—while Evilina ("Ev"), Lucinda ("Lu") and Violetta ("Vi") lolled on the rug before the fire with their arms around each other's waists in a very foolish and inconvenient manner, but I suppose they thought it pretty and so kept it up although there was no man to look upon and admire them. The two imps, Matilda ("Til") and Timotheous ("Tim") sat on hassocks at opposite sides of the chimney staring as if they never meant to close their eyes on visible things as long as life should last. Dolly sat at the center table with a book, not reading, but watching and listening and noting all that passed before her. I'm Dolly, writing down grandma's story.

Bless you! Neither of the others could do it to save their souls, though we are all geniuses in papa's and mama's estimation. Ev. paints oil colored pictures and sticks to pasteboard cards in the corners of the frames to tell you what they are; otherwise you might not know. Lu. sings and plays the piano, but she has taken a dislike to music lately because it was the occasion of breaking off her engagement with young Victor de la Mont. You see, this is how it was: One night while she was "executing," in more senses than one, the Marseillaise he thanked her with effusion for the pleasure she had given him, adding that he had always wished to hear our great national song, The Star Spangled Banner, but never had that pleasure before. She thought he was mocking her and she never forgave him and he is breaking his heart. Vi. recites. Her admirers say that if she should go on the stage she would rival Rachel, Ristori and all the great actresses. As for me, I write. I do not expect to succeed or to rival Mr. This or Mrs. That or Miss The Other. All the good and wise people I know fail and the wisest and best fail the most.

But, "to our mutton" or rather our "turkey." There we all sat as I have described. Secretly we girls were fretting because the tormentors of our lives would not consent to be put to bed, so that we could perform our last duties for them and feel free to enjoy ourselves with grandma. At last I burst out, for I could not help it. I said: "Who can doubt the doctrine of original sin and total depravity when they look at these imps!"

Vi. answered: "All the world may call itself totally depraved if it wants to, but I defy any one to dare to hint that grandma is or ever was totally depraved! So there now!"

This challenge brought out grandma's awful confession that she had once stolen a turkey! Ugh! It makes me shiver now to only recall my sensations at that hearing. And now she is going to tell us all about it.

The "three graces" on the rug untwined their arms from around each other's waists and sat up erect and attentive. The two cupids in the corners hitched their hassocks nearer grandma's chair. I closed my book and folded my hands in my usual calm and judicial manner. Grandma kept plying her knitting needles mechanically and commenced:

"I do not suppose that in any Christian and civilized neighborhood on earth at any stage of the world's progress so strange a Christmas custom as the one I am about to describe ever found favor. It certainly amazed and scandalized me when I first came to hear of it. But half a century ago, my dears, in remote country neighborhoods there was not that variety of Christmas amusements that we have now and here. Little dinner and tea parties, little dances to the music of a negro band of fiddle, tambourine, banjo and bones; fox hunts by day for gentlemen and coon hunts by night for colored men were about all. And as these were winter amusements they were not peculiar to Christmas. Christmas trees, Christmas annuals and other things that now mark the holy and joyous season were then and there unknown. People were often at their wits end to invent something.

Well, my dears, it was in the winter of 1839 that I left the Georgetown Academy of Visitation, where I was educated, to spend the Christmas holidays with my cousins, the Dunallans of Dunallan Hall, in St. Mary's county, Md. I had never been there before, but a cousin had lately married into the family—marrying a cousin of course, as was the custom in Maryland to keep the land in the family—and she had invited me. Now Dunallan of Dunallan Hall has a very fine sound, has it not?"

We admitted that it had indeed, and grandma proceeded:

"In fact the Dunallans were descended from an ancient and noble family in the north of England, with quarterings of the royal arms on their shields. All this and much more I had learned from Molly Dunallan while she was yet my room mate at the academy and before she had gone home to marry her cousin, Jonas Dunallan. A death in our family had prevented me from going with her to be her bridesmaid, so you see I had never met her husband nor had I ever seen her new home. But my youthful imagination was highly excited by the anticipation of spending the Christmas holidays at Dunallan Hall. I pictured to myself a stately stone mansion surrounded by a park and shaded by great forest trees; and stone stables and kennels and everything that my reading led me to expect to see in the country seat of a gentleman of family and fortune. I was also a little timid at the idea of meeting such great people, for my own dear father was only a poor lawyer of no great means, though of superior mind and culture. He, my father, put me under the care of the captain of the little schooner that in those days plied between Georgetown and Norfolk, stopping at all the little river-side landings and running up all the inlets that lay along the shores of the river and bay, to deliver and receive freight and passengers. A voyage that takes but a few hours by a fast steamer nowadays took over a week for the little schooner Maid of All Work. Beset by head winds, which compelled her to tack from shore to shore, it was not until the afternoon of Christmas eve that she reached Blackstone's Landing, where cousin Jonas had been notified to meet me. And there at Blackstone's Hotel—a large barn-like white frame house—cousin Jonas with a handsome, capacious close carriage and a fine pair of bay horses—the wedding present of Molly's father—awaited me. The carriage and horses were all that could be wished, but "Dunallan of Dunallan Hall" was a trifle disappointing. A tall, awkward, red-haired and red-bearded young man, dressed in an overcoat too large for him, and boots and hat ditto, came out from the bar to meet me as I advanced, escorted by Capt. Mike Townley and followed by a sailor with my trunk on his shoulders. He met me gravely and politely with something of a rustic shyness in his manner, and told me that Molly had been at Blackstone's with the carriage every day for the last three days expecting me, and that he was very glad to see me at last, &c.

The captain explained the delay by speaking of the head winds and a rough voyage all the way from Georgetown.

Then Cousin Jonas, after consigning me to the care of a colored chambermaid, invited the captain into the bar to take a drink with him, and from which he sent me a stiff glass of hot whisky punch, which did not come amiss for I was chilled to the marrow of my bones.

I had scarcely finished my glass when cousin Jonas came for me, and growing more familiar tucked my arm under his and led me to where the carriage stood.

A burly colored coachman sat upon the box and a mounted groom rode beside the carriage. This was even more than imagination had pictured in the anticipated grandeur of Dunallan Hall.

Cousin Jonas put me in the carriage and followed me and set beside me.

We drove along a road that soon entered a thick forest, when he began to entertain me with rustic compliments. The sun was not yet down, so whenever we came to a clearing he was able to point out the country houses that came into view. I thought they all looked very plain in contrast to the pretentious names they bore. As, for instance, "Mt. Alston," the "seat" of Algernon Alston, esq., was a rude wooden house of a story and a half high, with rough chimneys of hewn logs built on the outside of each end and a steep shingled roof. "Notely Castle" and "Chester Court" were houses of the same sort. And every one of these "castles" and "courts" and so forth had hen houses and poultry yards and kitchen gardens close about the dwelling and orchards and fields farther off. Among all that were pointed out to me one country house alone seemed suitable for a gentleman's seat. It was a large, double, two-story house of red brick with a slate mansard roof. The grounds were terraced and handsomely laid out in parterres for flowers and groves of rare shade trees, which in summer must have been very beautiful. Near the house, which was partially veiled with ivy, there were clumps of evergreens and one large conservatory. In the distance were stone buildings, evidently offices connected with the establishment. This was so different from everything else I had seen that I looked at it and after it as long as it was in sight and then asked Cousin Jonas who lived there.

Oh, a mere nobody, cousin! An upstart! A fellow who used to come down here twenty years ago peddling shoe strings and needles and other stuff, called under the general name o' "notions!" He's a decent man enough. He made a fortune somehow, but the Lord knows how, and bought land and settled down here. And you see how he goes it. Two carriages, open and close, saddle horses, race horses, hunters and hounds and fancy poultry, and he has a tooter in the house for his boys. One o' them boys, the eldest one, wanted to pay attentions to John Alston's daughter, but he was showed the door in double quick; I tell you. Rudolph Munnimacher making up to Polly Alston, indeed! I wonder John Alston didn't shoot him at sight!"

"Why, Cousin Jonas, what was there against him?"

"Why, he was one of the Munnimachers. His father peddled notions," said Cousin Jonas, turning around and looking at me in surprise that I should ask such a foolish question. "But here we are at Dunallan Hall," he added, as we drew up at a gate by the roadside and the mounted man servant rode forward to open it.

Not all that I had seen during our drive of the discrepancy between names and places in this old neighborhood had prepared me for the disappointment, almost amounting to mortification I experienced in first looking upon Dunallan Hall. Some hundred yards back from the road stood a rude wooden building of a story and a half high, with a double front and a steep shingled roof and rough-hewn stone chimneys at each end. Little log buildings near the house seemed to serve for kitchen, store rooms, &c.; and a winter-seared garden lay on one side. The groom opened the gate and we drove up a common, unshaded and uncared-for road to the house door.

Cousin Jonas got out and helped me down to the soft snow, and then assisted the man servant to take my trunk into the front "hall." Then the man took the coach and horses to the stables—the row of long buildings at some little distance on the right, as I had guessed. A glow of red light came through the windows on either side of the middle door and through the door itself as Mr. Dunallan led me into the "hall." The hall was a square place, with bare floor and whitewashed walls and four doors—front and back and on each side—and furnished with an old-fashioned mahogany sideboard that stood against the back wall, a tall, coffin-shaped clock in one of the back corners and a couple of old mahogany chairs.

But instantly, before I could notice all this, out burst Cousin Molly from the room on the left and threw her arms around my neck and smothered me with kisses and crushed me with hugs and deafened me with welcomes and solicitous inquiries. Did I have a good voyage? Was I tired? Had I been sea sick? Would I go to my room first, or would I come into the parlor?

To all of which I replied as well as I could that I had had a rough-and-tumble roll all the way from Georgetown to Blackstone's landing; that I had not been sea sick, that I would go right into the parlor, and that I was not in the least tired and was quite ready for a dance after tea if she had a fiddler on the place and enough to make up a set. All of which she assured me would be forthcoming at the proper time.

I thought Cousin Molly had grown very stout since I saw her seven months before, at which she burst out laughing and drew me into the parlor, where she introduced me to the three old ladies present—Mrs. Peggy Dunallan, her mother-in-law, a short, plump, rosy-cheeked little body in a black "stuff" gown and white muslin cap; Miss Becky Dunallan, the maiden aunt, a stout person, with iron-gray hair screwed plainly back from her forhead and tucked up behind by a tortoise-shell comb, and also dressed in a black gown, and Miss Penelope P. Poindexter, a tall, very tall, stately dame, in a long, straight black silk dress and a voluminous white muslin turban and black silk mits.

Such were the Dunallans of Dunallan Hall and their permanent guest. The latter was one of those "genteel" dependents who are so frequently to be found in the country parts of the southern states, who live by visiting around among their acquaintances. Miss Penelope P. Poindexter was of a highly aristocratic family, though for many years she had been penniless, homeless and almost friendless. She visited from house to house and innocently believed that the honor of her company was ample compensation for the cost of her maintenance. But in Dunallan Hall she had at last found a permanent home. And it came about in this way: One summer afternoon about twenty years before Miss Penelope P. Poindexter had been brought for the first time to Dunallan Hall by the Alstons, with whom she had been making a visit of some weeks. She had been invited to stay all night, and she liked her quarters or welcome so well that she stayed twenty years and never dreamed but that she was conferring an honor on the family for which they ought to be very grateful. Nor would any one among that kind-hearted household have disabused her of the fond delusion by word or look.

Mrs. Dunallan and Miss Becky received me as if I had been their dearest child, and Miss Penelope P. Poindexter bowed and courtesied to me with an air of great condescension. It was the "drawing room" of Dunallan Hall into which I was brought. A medium-sized apartment with whitewashed walls and ceiling hung around with engravings of Bible subjects and the front and side windows shaded by blue paper shades; a bare floor with a large home-made rag rug before the broad open wood fire and rich old mahogany tables and chairs set back formally against the walls. Molly took away my chinchilla hood and cloth cloak and aunt made room for me at the fireplace and repeated all the questions that had been asked me by Molly. Before I could answer half of them a colored woman came to the door and said: "Supper am on de table, Miss Peggy." And we were all marshaled out of the parlor into the hall and through the back door into the dining room, which was in keeping with the rest of the house, whitewashed walls, bare floors, old mahogany furniture and a glorious wood fire that made up for all other deficiencies.

But the supper! In contrast to the simplicity of the whole house, such a supper! I doubt if many rich people ever sat down to half so good a one! Tea and coffee of the best; cream and butter of the richest; bread, hot and cold, of several kinds; oysters, fish, game, cakes and preserves. The only drawback was that the host and hostess expected the guests to eat of everything on the table, and to eat plenteously; and felt aggrieved that I did not.

"Why, Cousin Dolly, I was down on the river this morning before sunrise to shoot that wild duck for your tea! Molly knows I was," Cousin Jonas complained in an injured tone.

I did my best to satisfy him, and soon, to my relief, his thoughts reverted to something else.

"Molly, what do you think I heard at Blackstone's today?

"What?" inquired his wife.

"Why that fraud, Munnimacher, swears that if anybody comes after his turkeys tonight he'll shoot 'em like any other thief!"

Exclamations of disgust and abhorrence broke from all the company except Miss Penelope P. Poindexter, who drew herself up in dignity, and myself, who felt and no doubt looked puzzled. But nobody was noticing me for the nonce! And in the animated discussion that followed I learned some curious facts. There prevailed in that county a Christmas custom so questionable that we must think it "more honored in the breach than in the observance"—a well-understood and fully recognized right for any man to get possession of his neighbor's Christmas turkey if he could and for his neighbor to take his if possible. And he who could prove that he exhibited on his dinner table on Christmas day the finest turkey, whether he obtained it by fair means or foul, was to win a prize. "Tom Alston," a name frequently on Mr. Dunallan's lips, had got Cousin Jonas' turkey last Christmas and thereby won the prize—a richly mounted fowling-piece—for showing the heaviest turkey, though it was known that he had stolen it. Cousin Jonas had never tried to steal anybody's turkey, though year after year he had lost his own. For, mind you, it was the custom among the neighbors that, though the hen house doors might be locked and barred, and the dogs unchained, no other precautions were to be taken to guard the turkeys, no watch was to be set, no gun to be fired. So the enterprising turkey-lifter would only have to force the door and quiet the dogs if he could. Now, then, because Munnimacher had openly sworn to shoot any man like a common thief who came after his turkey, which was understood to be one of fabulous size and weight, and, therefore, a vast temptation to the prize seekers, the devil entered Cousin Jonas Dunallan, and he swore with an oath that scandalized us all, and made Miss Penelope P. Poindexter jump in her chair, that he would have Munnimacher's turkey and win the prize—a set of double harness this time—or perish in the attempt!

"Oh, Jonas, don't think of such a thing! That cur is just the wretch who will keep his word and shoot you!" pleaded Molly.

"Nun-nun-no, Jonas! Dud-dud-don't you do nothing of the sus-sus-sort!" commanded Aunt Peggy, who always stammered when she was agitated.

Miss Penelope P. Poindexter drew herself up and began:

"In the days of my remote Scottish ancestors cattle stealing among the high nobility"——

But as all were too anxiously occupied in trying to dissuade Mr. Dunallan from his enterprise to listen to her family traditions she subsided into haughty silence. Mr. Dunallan was saying:

"I will give that low fellow a chance to shoot me this night and see if he dares to draw a trigger! And I will have his big turkey on our dinner table tomorrow and the prize harness on our horses the next day or my name is not Jonas Dunallan!"

"Marauding among my Scotch ancestry," began Miss Penelope P. Poindexter, but her voice was drowned in the answer of the opposition raised against Mr. Dunallan's resolve.

"I must have one of the nigger boys to hold the lantern for me while I open the door of the hen house," persisted Cousin Jonas, totally ignoring remonstrance as he rose from the table and went and brought his shaggy surtout from the hall and began to draw it on.

"That you sha-sha-shan't, Jonas Dunallan! If you choose to ris-ris-rist your own life, you sha-sha-shan't rist one of them poor niggers!" Aunt Peggy declared.

Jonas did not gainsay her in this, but laughed and caught my eye and said:

"Cousin Dolly, I bet my boots you're game enough to go along o' me and capture old Munnimacher's turkey!"

I know not what demon of mischief took possession of me at that moment, but I thought of Di. Vernon and Helen McGregor and other venturesome heroines (though in justice to them I have never heard of either robbing henroosts), and I answered: "That I am, Cousin Jonas!" and I sprang up from the table to fetch my cloak.

"Jud-Jud-Jonas Dunallan, you've gone mad! ra-ra-ravin mad! Dod-Dod-Dolly Phippard; sed down this minit, miss!" stammered and sputtered Aunt Peggy, leaving her place at the head of the table and coming around to me.

"Come along o' me, Cousin Dolly! I'm boss in this house!" commanded Cousin Jonas, loftily, but laughing all the time, as he lighted a candle and stuck it in the lantern.

I put on my cloak, buttoning it from throat to feet and pulling my hood over my head. And then I drew on my woolen mitts and was ready to follow my leader, amid the aghast looks of our relations and the muttered comments of Miss Penelope P. Poindexter, who was saying:

"Even in the lawless days of my remote ancestors no damsel of degree——"

But we lost the rest as the door closed behind us and we went out into the wild wintry night.

Heaven and earth, what a black and lowering sky. Not a star visible and the snow-covered ground only dimly seen in the smoky light of the lantern. The snow was deep but soft and came up over my boot tops, wetting my stockings before I reached the gate. An easterly wind was blowing a gale and rose in such gusts as nearly inverted my cloak, and if it had not been buttoned down so closely, would certainly have taken it over my head and off my back. And if it had not been for the lantern we carried we could not have kept the path leading to the gate. The black sky, the blustering wind, the spectral snow, all made a scene so wierd as I shall never forget so long as I live.

On we trudged slowly through the deep soft snow till my stockings were wet almost up to my knees; and with the cold snow chilling my limbs, the sharp wind cutting my face and ears, the darkness blinding my eyes and the lantern dazzling them, I had enough to do to keep on my feet as I stumbled along after my leader, who stumped sturdily before me bearing the light. I began to think adventures were more heroic than agreeable and danger easier to face than discomfort to bear. I inquired of Cousin Jonas: "Is it far from here?"

"About a quarter of a mile by a short cut. It is a mile or more by the road. You saw the place as we came along today," he answered; and then, as we had reached the outer gate, he gave me the lantern to hold while he took down the bars. We soon emerged upon the same road by which we had approached the house that afternoon, and which ran a mile or so parallel to the east boundary line of the Dunallan estate. A few hundred yards up this road we came to a fence on the opposite side to my cousin's land and he stopped and said: "Cousin Dolly, I must lift you over this."

"No, you musn't!" I said, and I climbed clumsily enough to the top of the fence and tumbled incontinently over the other side into a ditch full of soft snow.

Cousin Jonas set down his lantern, bounded over the fence and fished me out and shook and wiped the snow off my cloak as well as he could with his mittened hands.

"Never do that again, Cousin Doll," he said.

"I'll never go hen-roost robbing with you again!" I answered, crossly.

"Never mind, Cousin Doll; worse disasters at sea," he said. "Munnimacher's turkey will pay for all."

I said nothing more. Nothing permissible would have expressed or in any way relieved my feelings. On we trudged through a piece of waste ground overgrown with blackberry bushes and briars, of which nothing seemed left but the thorny stems and branches. My cousin's heavy boots protected his limbs, but the briars tore my stockings and scratched my ankles and fretted my nerves. And still the wild wind buffeted me, and still the snow soaked my chilled limbs. I began to repent my foolhardiness in venturing upon this expedition. Cousin Jonas seemed to divine my feelings, for he sang out cheerfully:

"Never mind, Cousin Doll! The retreat from Moscow was worse than this! And that was retreat, mind you, while this is advance. Forward! March!"

Through the marshy, brambly ground we plunged and scrambled along until we came to a fence on the opposite side. Again Cousin Jonas wished to lift me over; but I declined, telling him that I had learned something by my former failure and would be more careful this time. I climbed to the top of the fence, but, buffeted by the wind and bothered by my long cloak and worried by Cousin Jonas' interference, I once more lost my footing and fell over the fence and rolled over and over down a thorny bank and dumped into a ditch at the bottom! Once more my leader jumped the fence like a greyhound and picked me up and shook and wiped and condoled and scolded by turns.

"So much for your obstinacy," he muttered. "But cheer up, Cousin Dolly! only one more fence to climb, and that without any ditch or bramble bank on the other side!"

"Was there no better way to reach the man's place? This is horrible!" I said.

"Oh, yes! there is a better way a mile or so around, and then through his 'park' as he calls it, and then up the carriage road planted on each side with fancy shade trees, but that wouldn't suit our purpose! This will. This is the short cut, as I said before."

So through the evergreen scrub wood, scratched by the branches, soaked by the melting snow; wet and cold, and tired and disgusted, I trudged on after Cousin Jonas toward the last fence. As we neared it we were assailed by the barking of dogs.

"Oh, Cousin Jonas!" I cried, "the dogs have given the alarm and now the man will come out and shoot us!"

"If he does he will be lynched by the mob!" said Cousin Jonas.

"But that wouldn't do us any good! That wouldn't bring us to life again!" I cried.

"Don't you be afraid, Cousin Doll!"

"But oh, how those dogs bark!"

"Never you mind, the brutes know me. I'll soon quiet them. Soon as we get on the other side of the fence."

We trudged on a few yards farther and then he stopped.

"Here we are, Cousin Doll! Over this last fence and then we are at our journey's end," said Mr. Dunallan.

"Oh, but the dogs Cousin Jonas! The dogs! Just hear them! They will tear us to pieces!" I cried, half dead with fright, and fully convinced that nature had never intended me for a Di. Vernon or a Helen McGregor, or even a henroost robbing gipsy!

"I didn't think you were such a coward!" said Cousin Jonas, with a sigh.

"Neither am I!" I cried, my vanity wounded. "Up with you then! Tumble over once more if you won't let me help you."

I certainly would not, and told him so. I considered that I had some practice in climbing and had gained some experience, so I made my third attempt. I reached the top of the fence in safety, paused, and was meditating a cautious descent, when the burst of dogs upon Cousin Jonas so terrified me that I lost my footing and tumbled heels over head with a great splash into a duck pond below! Surely nothing so ignominious ever happened to any of my battle-ax heroines. The dogs were upon us too!

And just then the report of a gun rang through the air.

"The devil!" cried Cousin Jonas, as he pulled me out of the pond. "There! Shake the water and ice out of your clothes, while I quiet these dogs!"

They were barking and leaping about him so that I expected every minute to see him torn down by the throat, but he only pushed them aside, crying: "Down, Tom! What do you mean, Nellie! What are you about? Get out, Tip!" and so on.

Bang-g-g-g! rang out another report through the air.

"Oh, Cousin Jonas! Dear Cousin Jonas! Come away! Let us run! Oh, let us run away! We shall be shot! Oh, what a disgraceful death to die!" I cried and prayed, wringing my hands.

"Oh! you coward! Don't be afraid! See! I have conquered the dogs! They are fawning on me now! And——"

Bang-g-g-g reverberated a third report! I clung to Cousin Jonas' legs in the extremity of my terror and misery.

"Come along, I tell you, Dolly! Don't be frightened! The guns are too far off to hit us! The cowards are afraid to come near enough to me to get a sight! Come on! Failure would disgrace us now! We will have that turkey on our Christmas dinner table or—we will die gallantly in the attempt! Here, Cousin Doll! you carry the lantern. Here we are at the door of the hen house!" said Cousin Jonas, as he shook me off, stood me up and thrust the lantern into my unwilling hand.

Bang-g-g-g! Bang-g-g-g! rang and reverberated a volley of sharp reports.

"Je-ru-sa-lem! That sounded nearer," he exclaimed; "we must hurry up!"

"Oh, Cousin Jonas! For the love of heaven, Cousin Jonas!" I cried, praying and almost weeping.

"If you are a coward yourself don't hinder me, Doll! There, turn the bull's-eye of the lantern on the lock! So! That's the way!"

He took the lantern from my trembling hand and arranged the light to suit his convenience and then returned it to me, and its rays fell upon the building that I saw for the first time. He set to work on the lock and in a few minutes opened the door and then took the lantern again and disappeared in the darkness within.

I lay down flat on the soft snow and slush to keep out of range of the shots, and, trembling from head to foot, alike from cold and fear, I listened and waited for what should happen next!

"Squark! squark! squark!" sounded from the hen house, as, evidently, the invader of the birds' dormitory groped his way along, feeling the roosts and handling fowl after fowl to test its size and weight in order to secure the largest and heaviest.

"Squark! squark! squark!" shrilly screamed the frightened cocks and hens.

Bang! bang-g-g! bang-g-g-g! rang out another report of the guns.

"Oh, the man is mad! mad! mad! And we shall all be murdered!" I groaned, not daring to raise myself from the ground. I was startled by the glare of the lantern and the voice of cousin Jonas whispering hoarsely yet triumphantly:

"Here, Dolly! here's the bully boy! Weighs twenty pounds, I bet! Hold him while I go in and get the next best!" And he thrust the rough, scaly legs of the struggling monster into my hands, telling me to hold him tight with his head down and he would soon be too giddy to heave and plunge.

I had struggled to my feet, in too deep despair to resist or remonstrate any more. I did hold the creature with both hands, my fingers scarcely reaching around his rugged legs, while he still screamed and fought, leaping and jerking so strongly as to pull me nearly down upon my face. I had given myself up for lost and did not care what might happen next.

My "mad man" disappeared once more in the darkness of the hen house and the squawking and screaming of the poultry recommenced. The dogs began to bark again and momentarily I expected another volley of firearms, with the danger of being shot down, but, as I said, I did not care. I was now apathetic, like one in a heavy nightmare dream.

"No more worth bringing away, Cousin Dolly," said Mr. Dunallan, reappearing with the lantern. "Come on; we have got the famous prize turkey now in spite of Munnimacher's locks and bolts and dogs and guns! Hurrah! hip! hurrah! We shall have that turkey on the Christmas dinner table tomorrow and I shall get the great prize for the capture the next day and give it to you."

I could not respond to his raptures just then. I was too miserable. I cannot describe the manner in which, burdened by that heavy and floundering gobbler and my dripping garments, I once more scrambled over the fence, tumbling as usual on the other side, wet cloak, flounder-ing gobbler and all in a heap and struggled through the evergreen thicket, torn by the thorns and caught by the branches, but struggling on until——

"Bang-g-g-g! rang another shot, and the ball whizzed so close by my ear that I dropped the turkey, which, however, Cousin Jonas caught before it could recover its legs and run away.

"Never mind, Cousin Doll, they have missed us again, and now we will soon be out of their reach!" said Cousin Jonas, encouragingly. And as he then took the charge of the turkey and lantern I got along better?

We reached the second fence, which I climbed over without accident and began to cross the marshy blackberry field. With my wet cloak full of burrs and briars, and my boots full of melted snow and slush, we trudged along, Cousin Jonas encouraging me by his crowing over his victory. So we reached the third and last fence, which I surmounted with my lately acquired agility.

Then, as we were on the clear turapike road, free from fear of blunderbusses, I had leisure to rejoice with Cousin Jonas over our daring and dangerous feat. I felt proud—now that we had escaped—to think that we really had been under fire. Proud that Cousin Jonas had got the better of that curmudgeon. I felt now like Helen McGregor. Or more like the daughter of a border raider or moss trooper than of a city lawyer. So we at last reached the big gate leading into the farm yard. Here we were received by all the dogs in full cry. Cousin Jonas quieted them and we crossed the yard. As we approached the house nothing could exceed the self-glorification of Cousin Jonas and myself over our success.

"Won't them there women be astonished when we walk in and toss this turkey down on the table before their eyes?" (Jonas Dunallan, esq., of Dunallan Hall, was not as well educated as was Tobias Munnimacher, ex-peddler.) "Won't they now, Cousin Doll?"

"Ah!" I exclaimed, in sympathy too great for many words.

"And won't them Munnimachers sing small when they miss this turkey tomorrow?" he crowed.

"Ah!" I cried again, "but don't you think they have missed it already?"

"No, bless you, they think they frightened us away with their firing, but it ain't so jolly easy to scare us, is it, Cousin Doll?"

"Not to any great extent," of course I answered with a toss, for I was as young and vain as Violetta is now and did not stop to reflect that I had really been frightened nearly out of my wits; "but it is a wonder that they did not follow us up more closely with their guns," I added.

"Feared to! feared to! Feared we'd return the favor and fire back!" replied Cousin Jonas. We had now reached the house. There were no shutters to the windows of Dunallan Hall and the paper shades were not pulled down, so that the light from the fire and candles shone cheerily out from the front of the house. Cousin Jonas put the lantern down and knocked.

Molly's maid, Ary, christened Ariadne, opened the door. We entered and walked straight into the sitting room, where we found all the ladies of the family gathered around a small table before the open wood fire engaged in their usual avocations of knitting or sewing.

Cousin Jonas tossed his cap to a distant chair and stood before the disapproving eyes of the company as bold as brass!

"Here we are!" he exclaimed, "with the finest turkey in the state of Maryland! and not a ball in us, though we were fired at at least a dozen times! Wasn't we, Cousin Dolly?"

I assented with the proud humility that became a battle-ax heroine.

"Shot at! Oh, my Lord! My Lord! You might have been killed, Jonas!" cried Molly, hysterically.

"You will bring my greg—greg—gray hairs——" began Aunt Peggy, but she stopped, overcome by the difficulty of expressing her emotions.

"And while you were out on your expedition to the poultry house of the low-born person, too much honored by your visit, young gentleman," began Miss Penelope P. Poindexter, "your own premises were raided and your finest turkey taken off."

"Great whales and little fishes! Is that so?" cried Cousin Jonas, starting back aghast.

"Yes, it is!" chimed in Cousin Molly. "Uncle Nat heard the dogs barking. You know his cabin is close by the hen house. So he went there to see what was the matter. He got there just in time to see two persons running away with a turkey that was squawking awfully!"

"Oh! just in time to see them running away. Nat always gets in time for that. Well, what then? He gave the alarm, and every nigger that had a gun fired, of course," said cousin Jonas.

"No, Jonas, they didn't. You know very well you gave strict orders that not a gun was to be fired at any one who might come to our hen house tonight. Besides, all the men except uncle Nat were out on a coon hunt.

"Oh, yes! But I heard firing close to the house."

"So did we. It was from the coon-hunting party."

"Well, what did Nat do when he got there in time to see the thieves make off with their booty."

"Nat came up to the house and told us, and Ary and I went back with him to the hen house, and sure enough Floppy, our best brood hen turkey, was gone."

Here a deep groan from Aunt Peggy. Mrs. Margaret Dunallan, attested her grief at the loss of her favorite fowl.

"Well!" exclaimed Cousin Jonas resignedly, "It is the fortune of war. Maybe this will make up for that." So saying he tossed the huge turkey on the table.

All the ladies suspended their work and bent their heads to scrutinize the prize, while Cousin Jonas and I stood looking proudly on.

Then suddenly Ariadne, the pretty mulatto maid, surprised and offended me by bursting out laughing, and before I could recover from my angry astonishment, Aunt Peggy frightened me by an outbreak of excitement that caused her to stammer worse than ever, and rendered her words almost unintelligible.

"Lul-Lul-Lul-Lord a'mighty, Jud-Jud-Jonas Dunallan, if you ain't gone and kik-kik-killed my best brood hen turkey."

"No, it ain't. It is Munnimacher's gobbler," solemnly declared Cousin Jonas.

"It's my hen tut-tut-turkey," persisted Aunt Peggy.

"No, so it is. It's Floppy. He-he-he," tittered Ariadne.

"Why, of course, it is. Oh, Jonas," said Cousin Molly, turning the stupified bird over on the table.

And so it was! Jonas Dunallan had never been near Munnimacher's premises! Indeed he never would have taken a young girl on such an improper expedition. But by way of a lesson or a practical joke, or both together, he had taken me on a round about tramp over his own ground and brought me to his own hen house, and had stolen his own hen turkey, making me believe it was Munnimacher's prize gobbler. The dogs he had so deftly quieted were his own hounds and house dogs, and the firing we heard was from his own men on their coon hunt. Floppy recovered under good treatment, and lived to be the mother of many more broods.

"There, children! there is the truth about my stealing a Christmas turkey! I did not feel much like Helen McGregor when I went to bed that night!"

"But, grandma, didn' you git a awful toothache gittin' wet?" inquired Tim, who was cutting his second set of teeth and having trouble with them.

"An' didn't you git a awfur sore t'roat?" inquired Til, whose tonsils were her weak points. "Nor pleurisy? nor——" put in the elder girls.

"No, children, I got no harm at all. Young women were not so delicate then as they are now. Evvy, dear, there is your father's latch key in the door; go see to him. Lu and Vi, the little ones are almost asleep; put them to bed. Dolly, you stay and help me to undress. Good night, children, and a happy Christmas to you all!"

CREATURES THAT ARE FUNNY.

Birds, Beasts and Fishes Which Play Comic Parts in Life.

"THERE ARE CERTAIN ANIMALS in the various forms of animate existence which seem to have been singled out, for reasons not altogether easy of comprehension, as representing the comic side of creation," said a naturalist to a writer for THE STAR the other day.

"For example, take the batrachians. In that family of creatures the frog is the comedian, and in this capacity he serves most profitably the purposes of the caricaturist. Quite as distinguished humorously among the birds is the owl. So universally is the essential funniness of the owl and the frog recognized that it is difficult to see how the makers of comic pictures could get along without them at all. The Japanese, a people highly gifted with the sense of humor, never tire of employing both in their art. Go into any Japanese shop and you will find the frog and the owl figuring everywhere in designs and in the shape of absurd toys of all sorts of materials from china to cotton batting, some of them equipped with the gift of making strange noises and grimaces and even of hopping around. Even the children are fond of making funny little owls out of peanuts and mounting them in a row on twigs. Wherever bullfrogs are to be seen alive in restaurant windows, waiting to be cooked and eaten, you will find spectators gathered about amusedly. Both owl and frog have a way of gazing out upon the world with round, unblinking eyes, looking as if deeply engaged in wise reflection, whereas presumably neither of them is thinking of anything at all. Perhaps that has something to do with their suggestion of the comic.

"The owl, like the bat, is commonly used in the representation from a comic standpoint of anything that is ghastly. This is evidently because both are night flyers, and, therefore, mysterious, gruesome and suggestive of darkness and dread. The